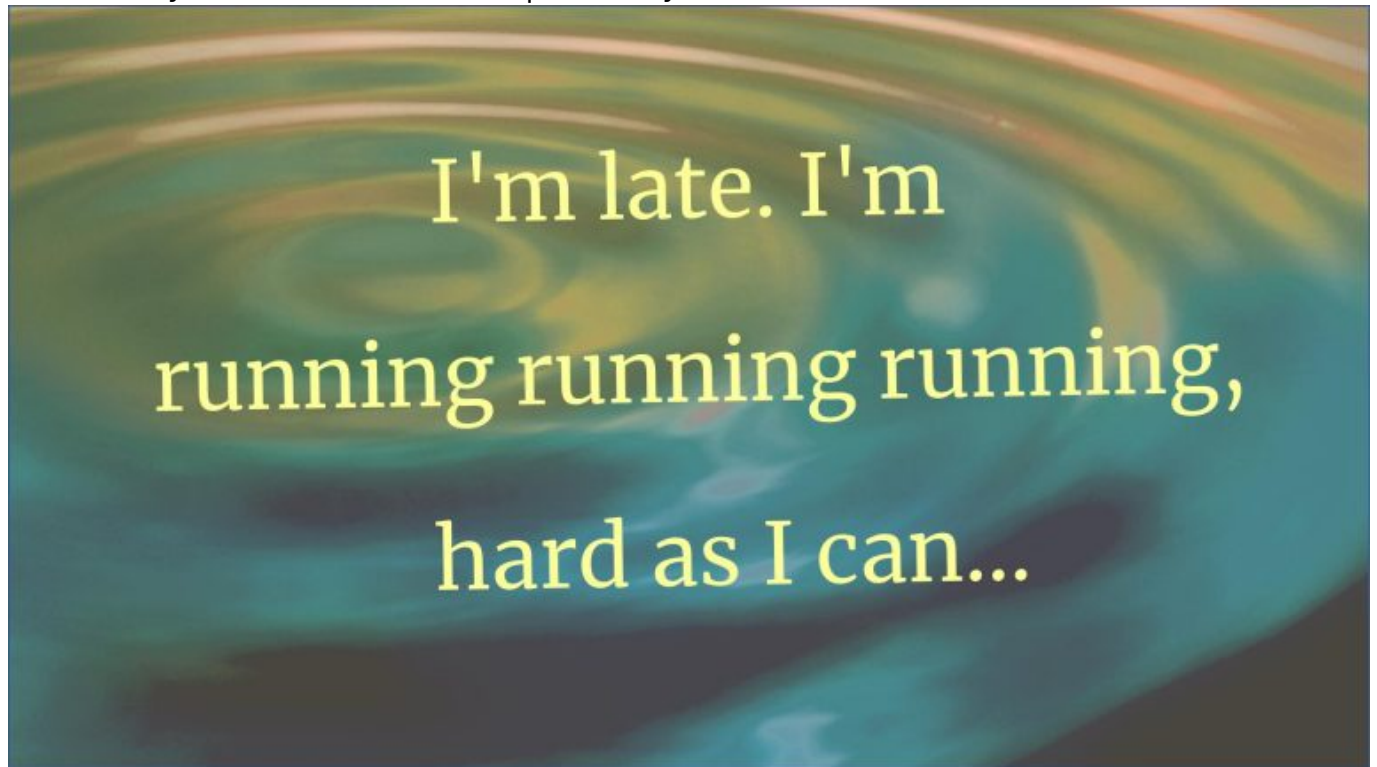


# Snow-Blind

Category: Poems

written by Shawna L. Swetech | January 31, 2025



Avalanche dream-heavy breakage of trees, boulders ripped from their footings. Chunks of ice bouncing past as the swirling white mass picks up speed. I'm running running running but can't stay ahead of it. Lungs burn, tears stream from the effort, the strain. Glazed in sweat, I wake up to the blare of alarm clock, hurriedly dress and drive to the hospital.

Time speeds into the day. It's busy; we're short-staffed again. One patient has to go for a test, has pain, needs medicine, while another has to be readied for early surgery. She's scared, needs pain meds, pre-op teaching, a guided-imagery CD to help her cope. Another, detoxing and crying. Someone else can't breathe, coughs blood, the doctor must be notified. Next room, a patient returns from inconclusive tests, she's worried, needs medicine for her nerves. They all want me to listen to their stories. Why the drinking started after her firstborn left for college—now the last is about to go. How long that man's been waiting for new lungs, says he's sorry someone must die first. Check clock. Pass meds. Better hurry. Discharge orders for another. I have to take the urinary catheter out first. Will she be able to pee on her own? Will pills work for her fractured femur, once I stop the morphine drip? Now another patient's going home, needs teaching. I haven't started charting, rated the patients' acuity or reassessed pain. Call lights flash, everyone needs something—a bedpan, a lunch tray. The discharge nurse, a family member, the lab tech all want to talk to me right away. A doctor demands I attend bedside rounds right NOW. I'm late. I'm running running running, hard as I can. The hallway is empty,

everyone's busy, no one can help. I have to use the bathroom. My mouth is dry,  
where's my water? Any minute now, the break nurse will come to send me on a break, but I'm not hungry. My palms are sweating. I feel sick.

Then disaster. I discover I've made a med error. Too late, I remember the nightmare, the *déjà vu* of panic, the total whiteout of whirling snow I couldn't stay ahead of. The spinning and spinning through empty air.